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ABSTRACT

The Montana University system's faculty vitality project is described. One component of the project is faculty exchanges among the six units of the Montana system. Hampered in program development by small staffs and inadequate resources, and cut off from professional contacts by limited travel budgets, the faculty of three small colleges in particular have felt left out of the mainstream of academic life. Faculty exchange provides exposure to new concepts and professional challenges. Faculty reallocation and development is a second project focus, since faculty members may be reallocated from over-staffed departments/programs to those that are under-staffed. In some cases, the faculty will require some additional training. Additionally, released time for faculty has been provided for course and program development. Finally, one of the best faculty vitality projects has been its evaluation system. Faculty members from each of the six units have been chosen to serve on the evaluation team, which evaluates proposals and projects at different campuses. (SW)

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MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM FACULTY VITALITY PROJECT

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MONTANA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
FACULTY VITALITY PROJECT

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Mid-career change is a part of the Montana University System Faculty Vitality Proposal; however, there are other ways which are addressed for helping faculty to remain viable and contemporary in their chosen field. Due to declining enrollments and budget restraints, resulting from rapidly rising costs, higher education is observing a fiscal conservatism on the part of the citizens which is implemented by state legislatures and the United States Congress. If we are going to maintain a high quality educational system, we are going to have to find many ways of helping faculty to maintain a high morale and remain vital in their chosen field.

Following is how the Montana University System is organized for the Faculty Vitality Project and how it is approaching this challenge.

The Montana University System is made up of six units. There are two universities, which are complex institutions maintaining programs of instruction, research, and public service, which offer baccalaureate through doctorate degrees. Three of the four colleges were established as teacher training institutions, but have evolved in additional directions. One college was formerly a school of mines, but has expanded into other technologies. Therefore, the System has a large variety of programs for the students who attend the units.

The $228,000 grant is managed by a steering committee which is composed of two representatives from each of the six units. There are three people who are known as the Executive Committee, which does all of the administrative work except for the awarding of the grants.

Due to the large diversity, we developed what we call the "menu" approach, meaning that each campus could request some of the funds from the Master Grant, based upon their needs.

THE GENERAL MENU OF CAMPUS FACULTY VITALITY PROJECTS

The following three headings: Faculty Exchanges, Faculty Reallocation and Development; and Revision of Existing Academic Programs and Development of New Programs; are the major areas in which the steering committee awards grants.

Faculty Exchanges

In a state of vast geological proportions and a small, largely rural population of approximately 700,000 people, the six units of the Montana University System have evolved their respective roles in relative isolation. Hampered in program development by small staffs and inadequate resources, and cut off from professional contacts by limited or non-existant travel budgets, the faculty of three small colleges in particular feel left out of the mainstream of academic life. Often these faculty members feel out-of-touch with recent developments in their disciplines and have begun to lose confidence in themselves. Inevitably, they pass their feelings of inadequacy onto their students. By way of overcoming these debilitating factors and reducing the sense of intellectual isolation that has in so many cases deeply eroded faculty vitality, we proposed a series of faculty exchanges among the six units of the System. We are

hoping that these exchanges will help develop a colleagual atmosphere among the six units through a faculty who have learned to know and care about one another. We also expect, through exposure to new concepts, viewpoints, and professional challenges, to help ourselves develop new competencies, new interests, and a renewed sense of pride.

Faculty Reallocation and Development

In the current period of changing student demands, many faculty have been led to expand their activities beyond the scope of their specialization. Too often these efforts have had an ad hoc character and are frustrated by the absence of funding to adequately meet new academic qualifications.

De facto shifts which have already occurred or which could occur should be identified. With proper planning in faculty development, faculty members may be reallocated from over-staffed departments and programs to under-staffed departments and programs. In this manner, the morale and vitality of both donating and receiving departments and programs are enhanced.

In some instances, the faculty will require some additional formal training. The extent and character of this training will be identified by the department or program in which the faculty member's new responsibilities fall.

Another alternative is early retirement. In addition to the obvious of opening up new faculty positions, other benefits exist. In a few instances, retired faculty members may return to teach a reduced load in a specialized area. This will permit the individual to maintain a feeling of self-worth without full-time responsibility, and provide the

institution with a high quality, low cost instruction. Personnel policies will have to be instituted to help in these instances.

Revision of Existing Programs and Development of New Programs

Discussions with faculty members indicate that many are frustrated by a feeling of being locked into an existing pattern of course offerings and academic programs. They know things are changing, e.g., use of computers in society, and they have ideas they would like to try, e.g., teaching students about the use of computers in specific fields. The shortage of resources leaves them unable to work on these new concepts. They often need specialists who are not available on their home campus.

As a result, there is regrettable, but understandable, tendency for some faculty to either lapse into perfunctory performance of assigned duties or become alienated from their profession. In short, too many faculty members may be tempted to turn off and drop out.

We are using some of the funds from this program to make available release time for course and program development for faculty members. In addition, we visualize the use of faculty members from other campuses as consultants in this process. Both the consultants and consultee are being enriched by this activity as we are not only helping solve a problem, but we are also recognizing the expertise of the faculty and the system.

We believe that by making a variety of alternatives available to faculty members that there will be many faculty members who will be revitalized. In turn, their morale will be lifted and this will be catching and hopefully permeate throughout the colleges and universities. We know this is not the panacea for all ills, but it is certainly a start in helping the Montana University System faculty to remain contemporary in

their chosen fields.

EVALUATION

Probably one of the best faculty vitality projects has been our evaluation system. We have chosen one faculty member from each of the six units to serve on the Evaluation Team. They have been trained as evaluators in a one-week evaluation session by going through a seminar and actually evaluating some proposals after which they broke up into teams of two people from the campuses and a master consultant to go to different campuses and evaluate their projects. These people have gotten to know each other well and every one of them has learned the evaluation process, learned an appreciation for different fields, and gained a respect for the different units of the University System.